

Last week I started weaning our early lambs on a market that would've made the sinking of the Titanic seem like a river barge tipping a sand bar on the Mississippi. Ewes were having to show a lot of quality to bring 70 bucks a head, and only special sets of lambs passed the 60-cent mark.

Forecasters were outdoing each other predicting doomsday for the woolie game. My buyer included in his presentation a comment that he looked for a lot of operators to quit running sheep for good this time.

I said if he knew ahead of time when they were going to quit, not to bother bringing in more seating for the sale, or to offer reservations, because I already suspected there weren't but about seven head of us left that were hardheaded enough to keep doing all the trapping and shearing and drenching that it was taking to pay our workman's comp premiums and the other outrageous items of expense that we were having to face.

Also, it won't be hard to go out of the sheep business on this part of the Shortgrass Country. We have enough poison bitterweed on two sections of our country in the winter time to kill off a big string of sheep. Besides the poison week, renegade coyotes, if left alone, will thin out the rest of the numbers.

I'd guess that if we'd stop hospitalizing the sick ones after frost and take up what meager control measures we have left to stop the wolves, we could have woolie-free ranges by next spring without ever hiring a 20- foot gooseneck.

I suppose in the past 40 years I've heard it said 88 times that the sheep business was doomed, and every time they were close to being right. Probably what's saved us so far is so few of us have a clear understanding of the meaning of the word "doom" that we keep plugging along when we really ought to turn in our chips.